
**AROOSTOOK BAND OF MICMACS**

P.O. BOX 772

PRESQUE ISLE, MAINE 04769

(207) 764-1972

August 21, 2000

Mr. Stephen Silva  
 USEPA Maine State Office  
 1 Congress Street – Suite 1100 (CME)  
 Boston, MA 02114-2023

Re: Maine Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (MEPDES) Program Application

Dear Mr. Silva:

Please accept this joint submission with the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians as our formal objection to the State of Maine's request to EPA for approval of the Maine Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (MEPDES) program. We are formally objecting to Maine's request because we feel that EPA approval of Maine's application will result in serious negative impacts to the health and well-being of Tribal natural resources and the survival and welfare of Indian Tribes and people in the state of Maine. It is our position that the State of Maine is not cognizant of Tribal needs for natural resource protection and it is our observation that the State of Maine does not consider Tribal needs and protections when administering environmental programs in the State.

The Aroostook Band of Micmacs Tribal culture is inextricably tied to natural resources. In fact, this connection is far greater than that of subsistence, it extends to the spiritual beliefs of the Aroostook Band of Micmacs as well. In "Traditional Micmac Spirituality" by Nelson Augustine, the role of Mother Earth and natural resources in Micmac spirituality is evident. A basic principle of Micmac spirituality is the unity and interconnected relationships of all things, both physical and spiritual. This means that all things must work together in harmony. If Tribal natural resources are being impacted or harmed, this disrupts the harmony, and the people are affected.

Of the seven sacred directions observed in Micmac spirituality, the ground below, Mother Earth, represents the provider of all that is good to sustain life, the nurturer; the source of knowledge of balance and equilibrium. As such, Mother Earth is respected and honored to the highest degree. Disregard for Mother Earth by polluting the water, air, and soil therefore directly conflicts with this Tribal belief.

Micmac spirituality also teaches us that there are four elements that make up the world: water, air, mineral, and fire. Each of these elements is vital to the survival of all creatures and respect must be paid to each of these elements. If water becomes poisoned with pollution, it is not able to sustain living creatures, and the whole system (life) fails.



At the very core of all Micmac spiritual ceremonies is the purification ceremony. Sweet grass and cedar are used in smudging ceremonies to purify people and objects of bad spirits and negative forces. As one Tribal elder explained, the purpose of smudging is to purify. How can purification occur if the materials (sweet grass and cedar) used for smudging and the water in which they grow are contaminated with pollution?

The sweat-lodge is used to cleanse the human spirit of bad spirits and negative forces and is also a symbol of the unity and harmony that exists in the world and demonstrates the traditional value that everything has to work together to accomplish a task. In the sweat-lodge, the four elements of creation are present: mineral, the stones used for the sweat; fire, the Sacred Fire used to heat the stones; water, to be splashed over the hot stones; and air, the steam and vapor that rises to fill the sweat-lodge. By itself, any one element alone would not make a complete Sweat-Lodge Ceremony, but with all four elements working together, you have a complete ceremony. If the water or air used in the sweat-lodge is not pure, all four elements can not work together, and the purification task is not accomplished.

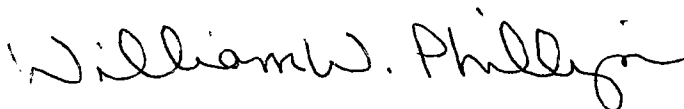
In addition to being a symbol of unity, the sweat-lodge is also a symbol of Mother Earth's womb. It is said that once you are inside the sweat-lodge, you are inside the womb. When you come out, you are as clean and pure as a newborn child. If the water and air used in the sweat-lodge are contaminated how can the purpose of this ceremony be fulfilled?

These are just a few examples of the importance of natural resources, including water quality, in the culture and spirituality of the Aroostook Band of Micmacs. It is apparent from these examples, that natural resources define Micmac culture and that a loss of the Aroostook Band of Micmacs ability to practice it's culture as it has for thousands of years will surely represent the loss of their identity, their tradition, and their rich history.

Given the Aroostook Band of Micmacs desire to continue its culture, and the potential loss of federal protection for Tribal interests, the Aroostook Band of Micmacs strongly urges you to reject the State of Maine's application for NPDES authority.

Thank you for considering our comments and concerns. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (207) 764-1972.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William W. Phillips". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "William" and last name "Phillips" clearly legible.

William W. Phillips  
Tribal Chief

Enc: Comments